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ABSTRACT

In the past two decades, sustained silent reading (SSR) has gained attention as a component in many schools' reading programs. Some advocates of SSR differ slightly in their recommendations of specific rules, but most agree on the following guidelines: (1) no interruptions; (2) everyone reads, including the teacher; (3) students choose their own reading material; (4) no required reports; (5) a wide variety of reading materials should be available in the classroom; and (6) the time period should be increased gradually. Research conducted to determine the effects of SSR has produced mixed results, but most researchers seem to agree that SSR has a positive effect on reading comprehension and on students' attitudes about reading at all grade levels. However, research is less conclusive on the effect of SSR on students' reading achievement. Of the studies considered, six found SSR to have a significant positive effect on reading scores, whereas five showed no significant improvement. Since SSR appears to positively influence attitudes toward reading, it also appears that its benefits are long range. More research is necessary to determine conclusively the relationship between SSR as a method of reading practice and students' reading achievement. A two-page bibliography concludes the document. (JD)

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THE EFFECTIVENESS OF SSR: A REVIEW OF THE RESEARCH

Alice Manning-Dowd

Sustained Silent Reading (SSR) has been around for as long as people have been reading. Whenever a person selects something to read for his/her own purpose, spends more than a few minutes reading it, and comprehends whatever he/she wants, SSR is occurring. In the past two decades SSR has gained attention as a component in a school's reading program. SSR is not a method of reading instruction, but a planned program of reading practice. SSR, sometimes called Uninterrupted Sustained Silent Reading or USSR (Stevenson 1980), is an attempt to incorporate reading as a normal activity into the school program. Moore (1980) described SSR as a structured activity in which students are given a fixed period of time for the silent reading of self-selected materials. Some SSR advocates (Towner 1975), (Blake 1979), (Cline 1980), (Moore 1980) differ slightly in their recommendation of specific rules, but most agree on the following guidelines:

1. During SSR time there are no interruptions.
2. Everyone reads, including the teacher.
3. Students should be free to choose their own reading material. Selections should not be made for them.
4. No reports are required, no records kept, and no questions are asked about what is read.
5. A wide variety of materials should be available in the classroom.
6. As the program continues, the time period is increased.

SSR can be implemented on any scale: in one classroom, in one school, or throughout an entire school district such as the program adopted by Elementary School District 86 in Joliet, Illinois during the 1986-87 school year.

There are two issues to consider in evaluating the effectiveness of any supplemental reading program: attitude and achievement. Advocates of SSR stress the importance of the student

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viewing reading as a holistic activity. They contend that if children are only taught isolated skills they will develope a narrow perception of what the reading act involves. They argue that proficient reading, like any other skill, requires more than just instruction in the various subskills. It requires practice in applying and transferring isolated skills to the whole process. It is reasonable to assume that if a child has developed a positive attitude toward reading, he/she will read more. SSR advocates reason that the more one reads, the more proficient at reading one will become. The outcomes or benefits that one is led to expect from SSR are numerous. Oliver (1970) has suggested the following as positive effects that SSR will have upon readers:

1. Increased attention span.
2. Improved self-discipline.
3. Increased sophistication in the self-selection of reading material.
4. Improved acceptance and enjoyment of reading.
5. Refined and extended reading skills.

Research conducted to determine the effects of SSR has produced mixed results. In a six week study using secondary Upward Bound students, Burley (1980) found that SSR had a more positive effect on reading comprehension than the three other practice methods in the study-programmed text, programmed cassette tapes, and programmed skill-developement kits. Manning and Manning (1984), on the other hand, found that fourth graders in an SSR practice group showed significantly less gains in reading attitude scores than students in both Peer Interaction and Individual Teacher-Student Conference groups and less gains in reading achievement than students in the Peer-Interaction group.

The majority of research on SSR has centered on its use as the sole additive to the regular reading instruction program. In these studies, SSR was the only treatment used with the experimental groups while the control groups received no form of independent practice time. In his Attitude Survey Sadoski (1980)

concluded that SSR was effective in promoting positive attitudes towards reading among students in grades 10-12, with the most positive results coming from the above-average college-bound students. In studies measuring students' achievement in reading as opposed to attitude, the results again are mixed. Kefford (1981) found that seventh grade boys in an all-boys school showed a 4 percent increase in reading comprehension and a 7 percent increase in vocabulary usage as a result of their participation in SSR for a six month period. Evans and Towner (1975) found no significant difference in fourth graders' reading comprehension scores after a ten-week exposure to SSR daily for twenty minutes.

When SSR is the only reading practice treatment, research studies that measure both attitude as well as achievement show some conflicting results. Summers (1982) found that neither attitude scores or reading achievement scores were affected by exposing 5th, 6th, and 7th grade students to SSR for a five month period. Summers and McClelland (1982) noted that the teachers in the previously mentioned study did react favorably and submitted that subjective data as a strong support for SSR adoption. Collins (1980) found no statistically different scores in word recognition or comprehension skills and no difference in attitude among 220 elementary students from grades 2-6 in a fifteen week study of SSR. Reed (1978) found that SSR for one day a week for 5½ months made no difference in attitude or reading ability of secondary school students in New Haven, Connecticut.

Several studies found that both attitude and achievement were affected favorably by SSR. Bartelo (1979) showed a mean gain of .7 to 2.2 in total reading scores of 6th, 7th, and 8th graders and an increased positive attitude as measured by an indication on an attitude inventory that the students spent 17 percent more of their spare time reading. Burton (1983) found a slight increase in 7th and 8th grade average students' achievement

and attitudes and a more significant increase in both achievemnent and attitudes of above-average students.

Aranha (1985) found a 2.19 difference favoring the SSR group in achievement and a 2.3 difference favoring the SSR group in attitude. She concluded that SSR accelerated the reading achievement of 4th grade students who already had a high standard of reading comprehension.

Finally, one group of research studies produced the most conflicting results. Cline (1980), in a long-term six year study of junior high students (grades 6,7, and 8) found no difference in reading achievement but some statistical difference in positive attitude. Langford and Allen (1984) found a three month difference in measured reading achievement scores favoring the SSR group of 5th and 6th graders, but no significant gain in positive attitude. Wilmot (1975) found that 4th and 6th grade students in the control group (those who did not participate in SSR) performed significantly better on reading comprehension, but that the SSR students showed a gain in positive attitude toward reading.

The research appears to be conclusive as to the positive effects of SSR on students' attitude about reading at all grade levels. Of the twelve studies cited, seven (Aranha, Bartelo, Burton, Cline and Kretke, Sadoski, Summers and McClelland, and Wilmot) indicated that SSR had a positive effect as measured on an attitude survey. Three studies (Collins, Langford, and Reed) showed no relationship between SSR and attitudes. Two studies did not address the topic of attitude (Evans and Towner and Kefford).

The research is less conclusive on the positive effects of SSR students' reading achievement. Of the twelve studies cited, six (Aranha, Bartelo, Burton, Kefford, Langford, and Wilmot) demonstrated SSR had a significant effect on reading scores; while five studies (Cline and Kretke, Collins, Evans and Towner, Reed, Summers and McClelland) showed no significant improvement in reading scores as a result of SSR. One study (Sadoski) did not address the issue of reading achievement.

The implication of this review of literature is that more research is needed to determine a conclusive relationship between SSR as a method of reading practice and students' achievement in reading. Because SSR does appear to have an influence on positive attitudes towards reading, it also appears that the benefits of SSR are long range. Measuring long-range benefits is somewhat more complex, but perhaps necessary if we are to obtain an accurate overall view of the benefits of SSR.

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